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Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSC-05
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INFO SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 22490

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MORG, TH
SUBJ: LEADING CANDIDATES FOR SUPREME COMMANDER

REF: BANGKOK DAO REPORT 6895 0349 78, JULY 11, 1978
(NOTAL)

SUMMARY: GENERAL KRIANGSAK IS SCHEDULED TO RETIRE FROM ACTIVE DUTY IN THE ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES ON SEPT 30. THE USUAL SPECULATION REGARDING HIS REPLACEMENT IS UNDER WAY, REVOLVING AROUND ADMIRAL KAWI SINGHA, DEPUTY SUPREME COMMANDER; GENERAL CHAROEN PHONGPHANIT, CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND; AND GENERAL SOEM NA NAKHON, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, ROYAL THAI ARMY. ADMIRAL KAWI APPEARS MAINLY INTERESTED IN BECOMING COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THA NAVY AND APPEARS LEAST LIKELY TO BECOME SUPREME COMMANDER. GENERAL CHAROEN EARLY APPEARED TO HAVE THE INSIDE TRACK, BUT MORE RECENTLY GENERAL KRIANGSAK HAS SEEMED TO FAVOR GENERAL SOEM FOR THE POST, WHICH HE WOULD PROBABLY HOLD, CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCURRENTLY WITH HIS POSITION AS ARMY COMMANDER. FROM KRIANGSAK'S POINT OF VIEW SOEM'S SUPPORT WITHIN THE MILITARY IS IMPORTANT NOW AND WOULD BE ESSENTIAL AFTER KRIANGSAK RETIRES. BASIC THAI STABILITY APPEARS NOT LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY THE OUTCOME AND WE EXPECT THAT THE THAI MILITARY LEADERS WILL MANAGE THE SUPREME COMMAND SUCCESSION WITHOUT UNTOWARD POLITICAL REACTION. WE HAVE

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EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH ALL THREE OF THE POTENTIAL
SUPREME COMMANDERS MENTIONED BELOW.

1. BECAUSE HE HAS ALREADY REACHED HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY,
THE CURRENT SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE THAI ARMED FORCES,
GENERAL KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN, WILL RETIRE FROM ACTIVE DUTY
SEPTEMBER 30. THE USUAL SPECULATION HAS ALREADY BEGUN,
AND DISCUSSION OF HIS REPLACEMENT REVOLVES AROUND THREE
CANDIDATES: ADMIRAL KAWI SINGHA, DEPUTY SUPREME COMMANDER;
GENERAL CHAROEN PHONGPHANIT, CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME
COMMAND; OR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY,
GENERAL SOEM.

2. ADMIRAL KAWI IS THE MOST SENIOR OF THE THREE MEN, AND
IT IS THE NAVY'S "TURN" IF THE ROTATION OF THE SUPREME
COMMANDER JOB AMONG THE THREE SERVICES CONTINUES AS IT HAS
FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS. THAT ROTATION TOOK PLACE AMONG
THE SERVICE CHIEFS, HOWEVER, UNTIL KRIANGSAK BROKE THE
PATTERN. THERE IS SOME SENTIMENT IN THE RTARF AGAINST THE
PRACTICE OF HAVING THE SUPREME COMMANDER WEAR TWO HATS
(I.E., BE SERVICE CHIEF AND SIMULTANEOUSLY BE SUPREME
COMMANDER). CLEARLY, ADMIRAL KAWI WANTS TO BE COMMANDER-
IN-CHIEF OF THE RTN, NOT SUPREME COMMANDER, AND THE ODDS
ARE THAT HE WILL REPLACE ADMIRAL AMORN SIRIKAYA AS THE NEW
CINC, RTN. THEREFORE, HE APPEARS THE LEAST LIKELY OF
THE THREE TO BECOME SUPREME COMMANDER.
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3. THE BETTING HAS CONSEQUENTLY FOCUSSED ON EITHER
GENERAL SOEM OR SUPREME COMMAND CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL
CHAROEN. GENERAL SOEM APPEARS TO WANT THE SUPREME COMMAN-
DER JOB BUT HE JUST AS CLEARLY WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO
GIVE UP THE POSITION OF CINC, RTA, IF THIS IS THE CHOICE.
ALTHOUGH THE SUPREME COMMANDER POSITION IN AND OF ITSELF
IS NOT ESPECIALLY POWERFUL, THERE MAY BE UNHAPPINESS ON
THE PART OF SOME OF THE RTARF HIERARCHY TO GIVE THE
POWER AND PRESTIGE THAT THE EXTRA HAT WOULD CARRY IF IT
WERE TO BE GIVEN TO ONE OF THE SERVICE CHIEFS AS CON-
CURRENT SUPREME COMMANDER.

4. EARLIER THIS YEAR, GENERAL CHAROEN APPEARED TO HAVE
THE INSIDE TRACK FOR THE SUPREME COMMAND, APPARENTLY WITH
KRIANGSAK'S BLESSING. CHAROEN WAS ONE OF THE CAREER
MILITARY WHO MADE THE SUPREME COMMAND HIS CAREER AND HAS
HAD LONG PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION WITH KRIANGSAK. FURTHER
CHAROEN HAS PRETTY MUCH RUN THE DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS OF
SUPREME COMMAND SINCE KRIANGSAK HAS ASSUMED THE RESPONSI-
BILITIES OF PRIME MINISTER. WITHIN THE SUPREME COMMAND
HIERARCHY THERE IS STILL A GENERALLY ESPOUSED VIEW THAT

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CHAROEN HAS, OR SHOULD HAVE, THE EDGE FOR THE JOB.
CHAROEN IS NOT ESPECIALLY POPULAR BUT AT LEAST SEEMS WELL
RESPECTED. OBVIOUSLY, HIS PROMOTION, COUPLED WITH
ADMIRAL KAWI'S LIKELY RETURN TO THE NAVY, WOULD OPEN UP
SIGNIFICANT PROMOTION POSSIBILITIES IN SUPREME COMMAND.

5. HOWEVER, IN RECENT MONTHS THE QUESTION OF WHO WILL BE
SUPREME COMMANDER HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY CAUGHT UP IN THE
MILITARY'S INTERNAL POLITICAL JOCKEYING. KRIANGSAK IS
QUIETLY SIGNALLING THAT HE IS NOW SUPPORTING SOEM FOR THE
JOB. THE ESSENTIAL REASON IS SOEM'S IMPORTANCE IN TERMS

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

OF KRIANGSAK'S OWN POLITICAL POSITION AND HIS NEED FOR A
FIRM BASE OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE MILITARY. AS RTA COMMANDER
IN CHIEF SOEM OCCUPIES THE KEY MILITARY POSITION IN
THAILAND. WHILE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS AND "APOLITICAL"
HIMSELF (AT LEAST SO FAR), SOEM HAS BACKED KRIANGSAK AND
HE WOULD BE QUITE COMFORTABLE WITH KRIANGSAK CONTINUING AS
PRIME MINISTER. FROM KRIANGSAK'S POINT OF VIEW, SOEM'S
SUPPORT WITHIN THE MILITARY IS IMPORTANT NOW AND WOULD BE
ESSENTIAL IN THE PERIOD AFTER KRIANGSAK RETIRES FROM
ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE.

6. GIVEN THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, THE ODDS APPEAR TO
FAVOR SOEM. HOWEVER THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE JOCKEYING
AND REVERBERATIONS AMONG THE THAI MILITARY SINCE THE

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DECISION WILL AFFECT THE CAREERS OF MANY SENIOR OFFICERS, BEYOND THE TWO LIKELY CANDIDATES. CONSEQUENTLY, AS THE SITUATION DEVELOPS OVER THE NEXT MONTH THERE COULD BE FURTHER SHIFTS, AND THE RUMOR MILL WILL CONTINUE TO WORK. THE HORSE TRADING AND RUMORS ARE BOUND TO CONTINUE UNTIL
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A DECISION IS MADE AND THE ANNUAL MILITARY MUSICAL CHAIRS GAME IS PLAYED OUT.

7. COMMENT: THE CONTROL OF SUPREME COMMAND OVER THE THREE SERVICES IS MINIMAL AT BEST AND APPEARS TO HAVE ERODED SOMEWHAT IN THE PAST YEAR, AS KRIANGSAK HAS FOCUSSED MORE ON HIS DUTIES AS PRIME MINISTER. HOWEVER, THE JOB IS ATTRACTIVE, AND THE PROCESS OF SELECTING THE NEW SUPREME COMMANDER IS GENERATING HEAT AND INEVITABLE FRICTIONS. ON THE FACE OF IT, KRIANGSAK HAS MUCH TO GAIN IN THE NEAR TERM BY SATISFYING SOEM. IF HE DOES SO, THERE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE COSTS IN TERMS OF HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SOME SENIOR SUPREME COMMAND OFFICERS WITH WHOM HE HAS LONG BEEN ASSOCIATED. HOWEVER, THESE OFFICERS DO NOT FIGURE NEARLY AS PROMINENTLY IN THE MILI-TARY POWER EQUATION AS SOEM. IN THE LONGER TERM IF SOEM DOES GET BOTH POSITIONS, HE WILL OBVIOUSLY HOLD A SIGNIFICANTLY POWERFUL POSITION, NOT ONLY WITHIN THE MILITARY BUT IN TERMS OF POTENTIAL INFLUENCE POLITICALLY. HOWEVER, THERE REMAINS SPECULATION THAT NEITHER KRIANGSAK NOR SOEM WILL GET THEIR WAY COMPLETELY. THE PERCEPTIVE DAO REPORT CONTAINED REFTEL OUTLINES SOME CONSIDERATIONS WEIGHING AGAINST SOEM GETTING THE SUPREME COMMAND POSITION CONCURRENTLY WITH HIS ARMY POSITION.

8. FROM THE USG POINT OF VIEW WE HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL THREE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES AND WOULD BE ABLE TO CONTINUE OUR EXISTING CLOSE COOPERATION WITH ANY OF THEM. IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT ADMIRAL KAWI BECOMES SUPREME COMMANDER IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SUPREME COMMANDER ROLE WOULD BE STRENGTHENED BECAUSE OF HIS STRONG PERSONAL QUALITIES. IN THE CASE OF EITHER SOEM OR CHAROEN WE WOULD EXPECT THAT THE ATROPHYING OF SUPREME COMMAND'S
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CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITIES WOULD CONTINUE. THE MOST IMPORTANT IMPONDERABLE IS THE IMPACT THAT THE CHANGE IN SUPREME COMMANDER MAY HAVE WITHIN THE MILITARY HIERARCHY. HOWEVER, AT THIS POINT WE WOULD EXPECT THAT

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THE THAI MILITARY LEADERS WILL MANAGE THE SUPREME COMMAND SUCCESSION PROBLEM WITHOUT UNTOWARD INTERNAL MILITARY REACTION. ABRAMOWITZ

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